

## Agreement in Number

### ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

**number:** in grammar, whether a word refers to one or more than one—singular or plural

**singular:** referring to just one item

**plural:** referring to more than one items

**agreement:** the use of singular verbs for singular subjects and plural verbs for plural subjects

**helping verb:** a verb used with a main verb to make a verb phrase. Forms of the verbs *have*, *be*, *do*, *will*, and *can* are common helping verbs.

**contractions with helping verbs:** combined subject and helping verb in one word, where an apostrophe replaces missing letters: *I've*, *I'm*, *we'll*, *you'd*, *she's*, *they're*, etc. When a helping verb is joined to *not*, an apostrophe replaces a missing letter: *do* + *not* = *don't*.

### HERE'S HOW

**Step 1: Find the subject.** Check to see if the subject is singular or plural.

**EXAMPLE** *Luisa* (love / loves) her cat Ripley. (singular subject)

*Pets* (offer / offers) good company and good fun. (plural subject)

**Step 2: Use a verb that agrees with the subject in number.** Keep in mind that *most* nouns ending in *-s* or *-es* are plural. However, most verbs ending in *-s* are singular.

**EXAMPLE** Find the singular verb in the first sentence. Find the plural noun in the second.

*Luisa* loves her cat Ripley.

*Pets* offer good company and good fun.

**EXAMPLES** In the following examples, the helping verbs agree with a **singular subject**:

*Luisa* **has** *been learning* a great deal about cats. (form of *have*)

*She* **is** *reading* about the history of cats in ancient Egypt. (form of *be*)

*The cat* **does** *seem* to have been a sacred animal there. (form of *do*)

*Luisa* also **was** *learning* about Egyptian art. (form of *be*)

**EXAMPLES** In the examples below, the helping verbs agree with a **plural subject**:

*Humans* **have** *kept* pets since prehistoric times. (form of *have*)

*Animals* **were** *seen* as useful in many ways. (form of *be*)

Today *pets* **do** *make* a big difference in many people's lives. (form of *do*)

*Dogs* **are** *considered* the most common pet. (form of *be*)

**Step 4: Check subject-verb agreement with contractions.** When a contraction combines a subject and verb in one word, they must agree. You may write them as two words just to check. Two contractions that are often confused are *doesn't* and *don't*.

- Use *doesn't* with all singular subjects—except *I* and *you*.
- Use *don't* with all plural subjects—and with the pronouns *I* and *you*.

**EXAMPLE**

*Incorrect:* That canary ~~*don't*~~ sing low notes.

*Correct:* That canary *doesn't* sing low notes.

*Incorrect:* I ~~*doesn't*~~ have any kind of pet.

*Correct:* I *don't* have any kind of pet.

*Incorrect:* Some owners ~~*doesn't*~~ feed their pets properly.

*Correct:* Some owners *don't* feed their pets properly.